

Statistical Brief

Americans and Their Automobiles

Most American households have a motor vehicle. In 1989, just under 9 in 10 American households had at least one automobile, van, or light truck available to use. Over half had two or more. This abundance both solved and created problems.

This brief describes some aspects of our transportation patterns and our relationship with motor vehicles—how we get to work, when we leave, our parking arrangements, the problems of street noise and traffic, and the use of public transportation. Data were collected in the 1989 American Housing Survey, sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and conducted by the Bureau of the Census. Similar information on transportation patterns and vehicle use will be available for smaller areas in Summary Tape File 3A from the 1990 Census of Housing.

Most commuters drive alone to work.

Slightly fewer than 9 in 10 workers drove to work. Some (12 percent) carpooled, but the vast majority (76 percent) drove alone. Mass transportation (buses, subways, trains, etc.) was the choice of 5 percent.

Only 1 percent relied on other types of vehicles (bicycles, motorcycles, taxis, boats, and the like). The remaining 6 percent either worked at home or walked to their place of employment.

Many of us are out on the roads at the same time.

The impact on local road systems of this regular large-scale movement of people going to and from work is intensified by the fact that many workers are on the road at the same time. Seventy percent of workers left their homes for their jobs within a 3-hour period beginning at 6:00 a.m.; 17 percent started

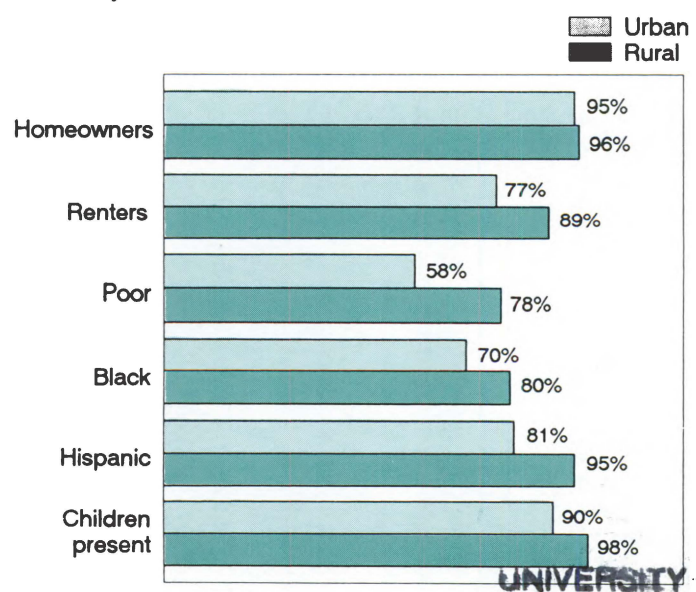
for work within the 30-minute time span of 7:30 and 8:00 a.m.

We like to shelter our vehicles.

American building practices reflect the Nation's dependence on privately operated vehicles. Fifty-seven percent of American households had access to a structure (either a garage or a carport) to shelter one or more of their vehicles. Another 33 percent had offstreet parking, like a driveway or parking lot, included with their homes. The remaining households (5 percent of homeowners and 19 percent of renters) had to use public streets for parking.

Who Has Access to a Vehicle

Percent of households reporting access to a motor vehicle, by characteristic of householder: 1989



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Many report traffic problems and street noise.

Motor vehicle use can create safety hazards, noise, fumes, and dirt. Slightly more than 1 in 3 American households reported that their neighborhoods had street noise or heavy street traffic. Highly developed areas were more likely to experience these conditions than less built-up locations. In urban areas, 32 percent of owners and 45 percent of renters reported these conditions; in rural areas, the comparable rates were 27 percent and 32 percent.

Many persons who had to put up with street noise and heavy traffic in their neighborhoods, however, weren't concerned about it. Just over half the households who reported these conditions said the situation didn't bother them.

Owners were slightly more likely than renters not to feel bothered: 53 percent compared with 51 percent. Elderly householders who experienced these conditions were less concerned than those under 65 years old. Sixty-four percent of the elderly weren't bothered, compared with 49 percent under the age of 65.

More renters than owners utilize public transportation.

Renters were slightly more than 3 times as likely as homeowners to use mass transit at least once a week—20 percent compared with 6 percent. Why? They were less likely than owners to have a motor vehicle but were more likely to have access to public transportation. Twenty-two percent of renters and 5 percent of owners did not have a vehicle. On the other hand, fewer than half of the homeowners reported they had mass transit in their area, compared with slightly fewer than 7 in 10 renters.

When mass transportation was available, renters were more likely to take advantage of it. Thirty percent of renters and 14 percent of owners who had access were frequent users.

Mass transportation use is highest in the Northeast.

Commuters in the Northeast were more likely than those in any other region to take some form of public transit to work on a regular basis: 11 percent compared with 4 percent for those in the West, the region with the next highest percentage. Northeastern commuters were less likely than others to drive to work alone: 70 percent.

The comparable figures for the West, Midwest, and South were 75, 78, and 79 percent, respectively.

More Information:

Supplement to the American Housing Survey for the United States in 1989, Current Housing Reports, Series H151/89-1. For sale by U.S. Government Printing Office. Contact Customer Services at the Census Bureau (301-763-4100) for ordering information.

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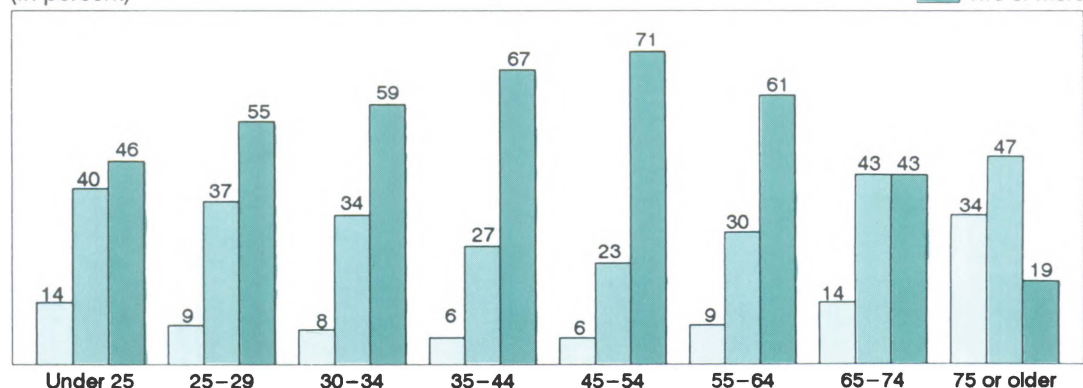
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How Many Vehicles We Have

Number of vehicles available to households, by age of householder: 1989

(In percent)



Note: Because of rounding, the figures in some age categories do not add to 100.